



ay model of the Dominguez-Escalante Monument erected on  
City Park in 1976. Sylvestre, the Indian guide, is at left.

## 1776

On September 23, 1776, a small cross was placed on an old lake bench at the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon in commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the coming of the first non-Indians to Utah Valley. These first visitors were two Franciscan friars, Fray Silvestre de Escalante (diarist) and Fray Francisco Atansio Dominguez (leader), and their company of "hispanic and mixed breed laymen." Their objective was to open a trail from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the missions of Northern California. They had left Santa Fe on July 29, 1776, and reached Utah Valley on September 23; they were never to reach Northern California. Their route into Utah Valley followed the Diamond Fork River (which they called Rio de San Lino) to Spanish Fork Canyon and then west along the Spanish Fork River. They described Diamond Fork and Spanish Fork Canyons as having "pretty bends in both of them and everything just right for sheep-herding camps." A hundred years later others who explored the canyons came to the same conclusion.

In Spanish Fork Canyon they passed three large sulphur springs (later to be the site of Castilla Springs, a popular bathing and health resort). Because of these springs they named the river that flowed through the canyon "Rio de Aguas Calientes"--River of Warm Water.

Then (quoting from the translated journal kept by Escalante) "We went for half a league northwest, crossed over to the other side of the river, went up a small hill (the old lake bench where the cross was erected in 1976) and caught sight of the lake and spreading valley of Nuestra Senora de la Merced of the Timpanogotzis (Utah Valley)."

They followed the northern side of the river into the valley, crossed to the other side of the river and made camp on one of its "southerly meadows", which they named Vega del Dulcissimo Nombre de Jesus (The Plain of the Most Sweet Name of Jesus). Their campsite was about two miles south of the present town of Spanish Fork about where U.S. Highway 91 crosses the Spanish Fork River. They described this area and the river as follows: "...one toward the south is the one of hot waters upon the spreading meadows, where there is sufficient irrigable land for two good settlements." A hundred years later the Spanish Fork River and its deltas were indeed serving two "good settlements," Spanish Fork and Salem, plus several smaller communities.

However, it is not likely that Spanish Fork Canyon, Spanish Fork River, or Spanish Fork City were named after the Dominguez-Escalante Expedition; nor, as many think, did the Mormon settlers give these places their names. The name "Spanish Fork" appears on John C. Fremont's map of the area published in 1845, two years before the Mormons came to Utah and five years before the first settlers arrived in Palmyra. It is quite probable that the name "Spanish Fork" was derived from the fact that the route of the Taos trappers during the early part of the 1800's followed the canyon and the river.

Dominguez and his party found the Indians of the area eager to be friends. The settlers 75 years later also found the Indians friendly, but this feeling soon turned to hostility when the Indians realized they would have to give up their traditional hunting grounds to the newcomers. The Dominguez-Escalante Expedition spent only a short time in Utah Valley, their last camp being on September 26 at Peteetneet Creek where the Payson Memorial Park is presently located. Perhaps their short stay contributed to their popularity with the Indians.

If the Spanish padres had returned and established a mission among the Indians of Utah Valley, the history books would have had an entirely different story to tell of the years to come. As it was, only a handful of white men visited the valley during the